

Farmington Valley Trails Council

Greenway News



President's Letter



I recently spoke at our annual meeting in Avon on the state of the rail-trail system of which the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) is the north-south spine and part of the East Coast Greenway. We have had a remarkable 2008, but so have the areas to the north and south. The truth is that we are close to having one of the premier *regional* multi-use rail-trails in the United States.

The FCHT runs about 84 miles from New Haven to Northampton, MA. To our south, New Haven has completed the design for the final section north to Hamden, with construction starting in the spring of 2009. In Hamden, the final 2.3-mile section to the New Haven border is finished, including a new bridge over Putnam Avenue for a continuous off-road route of over 14 miles well into Cheshire. Cheshire is looking for funds to complete their remaining gap in the trail north. In Southington, the town is designing the section from Cheshire to the paved trail in the town center. The rail corridor north to Plainville was recently abandoned and can finally go into development. The Plainville Greenway Alliance and the Town of Plainville are working on both an on and off-road route for their portion of the trail. Negotiations continue with Pan Am Railways on the still active rail line to create final trail routes in the existing right-of-way.

From Red Oak Hill Road, the trail is paved for 21 continuous miles with an almost finished gap in East Granby and a small gap in Suffield. In Simsbury, the piece of the trail that currently runs on sidewalks from the Hop Brook Bridge to Drake Hill Road and then to Iron Horse Blvd will be replaced by an easement for the trail and construction will take place in 2009. 5.57 miles in East Granby and Granby were paved last fall and finished this year. After much delay, (cont. page 3)

New England Trail Review

We all know that the finest multi-use trail in the Northeast runs through the heart of the Farmington Valley. It is not, however, the only trail in the region. If you're looking to build your rail-trail resume, one delightful addition would be the Norwottuck Rail Trail, an 8.5 mile paved path linking Northampton, Hadley and Amherst, MA along the former Boston & Maine Railroad right of way, and named for the Norwottuck branch of the Nipmunk Native American tribe.

The stretch of the Boston & Maine over which the bike path now lies was built in 1897. Never popular with commuters, passenger service was discontinued in 1932. With the interstate highway system providing faster and cheaper transportation alternatives, freight service was discontinued in 1979 and the rail line was eventually abandoned. In 1993, the Norwottuck Trail opened providing safe passage for pedestrians, wheelchairs, joggers, in-line skaters, bicyclists, and cross country skiers. The bike path is paved with a mixture of bituminous asphalt and recycled glass, which, when reflecting the afternoon sun gives a sparkling luster to an otherwise drab surface. Like nearly all rail trails, the path is mostly flat with one or two slight grades. The trail is well marked with mile posts and road signs at highway intersections. Major highways are easily negotiated by bridge or tunnel. Sadly, this lovely trail has not been well maintained and is best negotiated on a hybrid or mountain bike. Skaters will find it impossible to safely negotiate the tree roots which have turned the trail into a washboard. Efforts to resurface the trail are currently underway, but until the actual pavement hits the ground, be forewarned.

The trail crosses a surprisingly rural landscape of farms and designated conservation areas as it makes its way from Northampton to Amherst. The best place to begin your walk, jog or ride is at Elwell State Park on Damon Road in Northampton. Immediately upon exiting the trail head parking lot, you will cross a 1/4 mile long, restored iron Boston & Maine... (cont. page 2)



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Ugly Facts:

- 80 million American Bicyclists
- 700 Died in 2007
- "Typical" deaths are over 16 males not wearing a helmet.
- 65% of deaths are from Traumatic Brain Injury.
- Helmet usage rates in the US still hover at around 25%.

Trail Use Notes

A Word About Cross Country Skiing

It is no secret that cross country skiing provides a wonderful winter workout. There is a reason why a cross country skier is on our logo! Even easy skiing, as offered by our Valley trail system, results in a full-body tune-up. In addition to the physical benefits, it is a lot of fun. This winter, we have had more than the usual number of skiing opportunities resulting from extra snow combined with colder temperatures.



It is a sign of courtesy to not walk in or otherwise obliterate skier's tracks. A large number of northern New Englanders seem to know this. However, hikers and snowshoers in southern New England are less aware.

This should probably be a posted rule of the trail. You can help by spreading the word. And, if as yet you haven't already fallen in love with this excellent winter sport, be sure to give it a try.

Trail Congestion and Courtesy

When the snow starts to melt in the coming months we will again be able to use the trail system in whatever way we wish. However, we have had increasing complaints from walkers, runners and a few inline skaters that bicyclists are not announcing themselves when overtaking them. This is more than common courtesy—it is an important safety rule that needs to be followed by ALL BICYCLISTS. Please yell "On your left" when overtaking, or if you do not wish to use your voice an inexpensive bell or horn is a good option. There is blame to be apportioned on the other side as well, walkers are reminded to not walk more than two abreast so that bicyclists can overtake them safely without having to go off the paved trail. Walkers and runners just need enough warning by an overtaking bicyclist so they can edge over to the right and everyone wins!

Trails-in-Motion

**Iron Horse Blvd.
Simsbury, CT
Sat. June 6th, 2009
National Trails Day**

The FVTC is proud to announce the 12th Annual 2009 Trails in Motion event, sponsored by **REI.**

The premier events are the 10/30/50-mile bicycle tours utilizing the trails and allowing participants to enjoy some of the most spectacular scenery in the Farmington Valley. Light breakfast is provided at the start. There are rest stops along the way, with food, water, and energy boosters. All the registrants should finish at roughly the same time due to staggered starts. Door prizes include a new bike. Check our website at www.fvgreenway.org for more information and on-line sign-up.

New England Trail Review, Cont.

railroad bridge over the Connecticut River. About two miles down the trail, Valley Bicycle maintains a store front in the restored Hadley railroad station. You satisfy your cycling needs, as well as your personal needs at the next-door ice cream shop which also carries bottled water, power drinks, snacks and thoughtfully provides tables and chairs for its patrons. Another mile or so brings you to Pete's Drive-In, an excellent example of how businesses can attract new customers. Besides the usual burgers, fries and an impressive selection of soft serve ice cream flavors, Pete also offers easy access to and from the trail, clean comfort facilities, picnic tables, bike repair and first aid. It is three more miles to the Town of Amherst and Amherst College. If you want to explore the town and campus, ride through the tunnel under Route 116 where you can leave the trail and ride the short distance into town. Once you are back on the trail you can continue the remaining 2.5 miles to the trail head at Station Road in South Amherst. This section traverses wetlands and swamps which are fully stocked with beaver dams and great blue herons. The active rail line on your left is the New England Central line which runs from New London to the Canadian border. At Station Road you will find ample off road parking, but no bathrooms. If you are still feeling energetic, an additional 1.5 miles of paved trail has recently been added beyond the Station Road trail head allowing you to extend your ride to a twenty mile round trip.

Once back at Elwell State Park, take the short drive into Northampton with its eclectic mix of small shops and fine restaurants. If you've worked up a thirst, the Portsmouth/Northampton Brewery offers a wide variety of locally brewed beers on tap and good food. While in the area, stop at John Skinner State Park in Holyoke. From the top of Mt. Holyoke, the broad flood plain of the Connecticut River lies before you with panoramic vistas from the wrap around porch of the restored hotel/museum. It is truly magnificent, especially in the fall.

To reach the Elwell Park trail head, take I-91 North to Exit 19 (Route 9). Straight off the ramp through the light and onto Damon Road. The Park is about twenty yards down on the right.

NEWS!

The FVTC has become a member of the Farmington Valley Visitors Association in recognition of the synergies between our organizations. For more information on the FVVA call 860-676-8878 or visit www.fvva.com



President’s Letter, Cont.

construction of the Salmon Brook Bridge is nearly complete with only some work on the aprons needed. The town is finally close to finishing with the help of a \$70,000 grant from our organization. To the north, progress has been slow in Suffield due to DOT’s requirement that the existing bridges over two small brooks be replaced rather than refurbished, doubling the cost. DOT recently released more funds, and in late January they finally got the authorization to re-bid the project at the new “improved” budget of \$790,000 for their .37 miles of trail to the Massachusetts border. Suffield hopes to procure an STP Grant for their funding shortfall, which may be difficult in the current atmosphere in Hartford.

In Massachusetts, the trail has been completed 3 miles north from the state line in Southwick past Lake Congamond. The 3.2-mile Phase II is designed and construction is pending the installation of a gas main under the right-of-way. Phase III will follow. In Westfield, one of the few elevated trails over a community in New England has been designed and is awaiting funding. Farther north, in a town known for resistance to the trail, a new group, Friends of the Southampton Greenway now exists. Even better, that town has recognized the trail by placing it in their new open space plan. Massachusetts has earmarked funds for the purchase of the right-of-way, and the railroad is willing to hold the land until the town is ready to move on the project. The first 4.2 mile section of the Manhan Trail in Easthampton is complete and a portion of it will become part of the FCHT. Finally, in Northampton, the connector between the Norwottuck Trail in the northeast to the Manhan Trail in the south has been constructed right through town. The connection with the FCHT is in design, and will include a section of rail-with-trail.

I never thought I’d actually say that the majority of the FCHT is in completion with work progressing on the remaining gaps. It could not have been done without the help of our board, our members, and our volunteers. I look forward to an historic 2009 when our section of the FCHT is finished. As always you can find me at rbd1414@hotmail.com. My regards to you all. — Bruce.

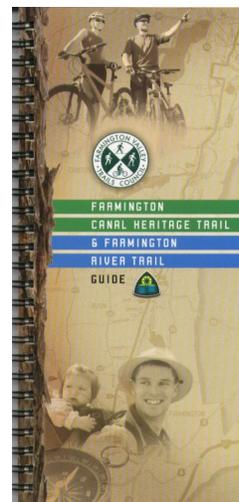
A Brief History of the Bicycle

It can be said that French father and son Pierre and Ernest Michaux were the inventors of the bicycle as we know it, as Ernest designed and built the first crank and pedal system in 1861. By 1865, a two-wheeled machine with pedals directly on the same-sized front wheel was becoming very popular. The velocipede was entirely made of wood and very heavy, often with metal tires. Usually ridden on lousy roads, it is no surprise that they became known as “Boneshakers”.

The next rage was the high wheel bicycle. Metallurgy had advanced by 1870 to the point that lighter, stronger frames could be built. The pedals still ran the front wheel (with no freewheel) but the wheel was smoother with hard rubber tires and long spokes which “gave” a bit. The wheel was so large because the bigger the wheel the farther you can travel with one rotation of the pedals! This was the ride of choice through the 1880s, but not for the faint of heart. You were very high up and right on the center of gravity so if the wheel stopped short you were propelled onto your face. Eventually the small wheel was moved to the front to avoid tipping over and this model was called the safety. Another “safe” form was the high wheel tricycle. Innovations on tricycles were the precursors of automotive and aviation designs.

Even stronger metal in the mid-1880s allowed fine chains and sprockets to provide gear ratios that once again made the same-size two-wheeler an option. Inventor Kirkpatrick Macmillan of Scotland added important design elements like rear-wheel drive and front wheel steering independent of the transmission. The Starley family of Coventry, England sold a design with chain drive and a favorable gearing ratio by 1885. They remained uncomfortable with the hard rubber tires, and so a variety of suspensions were tried. The two designs competed: one was safer by far, the other more comfortable. It was the rise of the pneumatic tire that finally killed the high wheel bicycle. An obscure Irish veterinarian called Dunlop fitted a pair of air-filled tires on his son’s bike and created essentially what we know and use today. By the 1890s there was a full-blown bicycle craze that didn’t slow until the general adoption of the automobile in the 1920s. The bicycle was entrenched as a means of transportation, health, and freedom.

New Trail Guide



Free to Members and new Members.

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**FARMINGTON VALLEY
GREENWAY NEWS**

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Your Support is Important!



Check desired box and enclose membership fee:

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